

# BAC

Modern Combat Aircraft 5

# LIGHTNING



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*Left: Togetherness. Four No 11 Squadron F6s, armed with Red Top, in close up formation. The squadron took on the training responsibility on Lightnings from the autumn of 1975.  
/ MoD via P. Collins*

# A Classic Fighter

The English Electric (now British Aerospace) Lightning will go down in the history of aviation as one of the most classic of fighters. It was the first and only truly supersonic aircraft to be fully developed by Britain on her own, and as such it was beloved by pilots, but not so enthusiastically received by politicians. Its story covers three decades (the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s) and parts of two more (the latter part of the 1940s, and very likely the whole of the 1980s) so that it is at once both an historical aircraft and one that remains very contemporary.

Its conception occurred very shortly after the end of World War II when English Electric, who had come back into aviation in 1938 and had spent the war years making aircraft from other companies' designs, looked round for new designs of their own. They started the Canberra bomber which, although it turned out to be one of the best British sellers, was, with its straight wing and its two engines placed in the wings — a similar layout to that tried in the Meteor fighter — no great technical breakthrough.

The Lightning, however, was, 'something else' as sketched on the back of the proverbial envelope — a 60° sweepback wing, two engines mounted one on top of the other inside a slab-sided fuselage, with the pilot sitting on top of the lot, advanced avionics which would turn the aircraft into a flying platform for shooting down with missiles enemy bombers, an all moving tail, and powered controls. Such an advanced design was hard to swallow at the Ministry of Supply and at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, but the Ministry swallowed it sufficiently to issue in 1947 an experimental study contract, ER103, and then two years later a contract, F23/49, for two prototypes and an airframe to be used for static test.

*Right: First flight of the P1, the original prototype, took place at Boscombe Down on 4 August 1954, Boscombe being preferred to the English Electric company airfield at Warton by the test pilot, Wg Cdr R. P. 'Bee' Beamont because of the longer runway. One of the pair of Sapphire engines shoots flame during a run-up prior to flight. / British Aerospace (BAe).*





